DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 161 Cs 211 028

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TITLE Connecting Writing: Fostering Emergent Literacy in

Kindergarten Children. Technical Report No. 412.

INSTITUTION Bolt, Beranek and Newman, Inc., Cambridge, Mass.;

Illinois Univ., Urbana. Center for the Study of

Reading.

SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED),

Washington, DC.

PUB DATE Nov 87

NOTE 28p.; Portions of this paper were presented at the

Conference on Reading and Writing Connections

(Urbana, IL, October 19-21, 1986).

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Basic Skills; Classroom Environment; Cognitive

Development; Creative Dramatics; Creative Expression; Creative Writing; *Kindergarten; Literacy; Primary Education; *Reading Writing Relationship; Student Writing Models; *Writing Instruction; *Writing

Skills

IDENTIFIERS Childrens Writing; *Emergent Literacy

ABSTRACT

Based on the perspective on childhood literacy which assumes that listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities develop concurrently and interrelatedly rather than sequentially, a kindergarten literacy program was implemented in classrooms in Sas Antonio, Texas, to influence young childrens' writing development. Writing was linked with other activities in the childrens' lives and with other subject areas in the curriculum, and these connections included: (1) using writing for functional purposes (for example, writing to pen pals, creating shopping lists and menus); (2) linking writing with reading, which involves students reading their written work aloud; and (3) connecting writing with children's literature through various response activities (creative dramatics, artwork, imitative writings). Connecting kindergarten writers with each other is another important factor in beginning writing development. (Student writing samples, a chart analyzing writing systems before and after creative dramatics, and an extensive list of references are appended.) (MM)



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

Technical Report No. 412

CONNECTING WRITING: FOSTERING EMERGENT LITERACY IN KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN

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The University of Texas at San Antonio

November 1987

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Portions of this paper were presented the Conference on Reading and Writing Connections sponsored by the Center for the Study of Writing at Berkeley and the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illingis held in Urbana-Champaign, October 19-21, 1986. The Conference was funded by the United States Department of Education through Grant No. OERI-G-86-9004 awarded to the University of California. This paper will also appear in J. Mason (Ed.), Reading and Writing Connections. Newton, MA: Allyn & Baron.



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Abstract

This paper describes how writing has been integrated into a kindergarten emergent literacy program in classrooms in the San Antonio, Texas area. The idea constructing writing with other activities in the children's lives and with other subject areas in the curriculum prove to be especially important in fostering the kindergartners' literacy development. Three such connections are described: (1) connecting writing to functional purposes, (2) connecting writing with reading, and (3) connecting writing with children's literature. Finally, the importance of connecting kindergarten writers with each other is emphasized.



CONNECTING WRITING: FOSTERING EMERGENT LITERACY IN KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN

A Writing Story

No doubt five-year-old Sommer was smitten the first time she saw Tommy's picture on the Pen Pals chart in the kindergarten classroom. Tommy, from the afternoon class, had been chosen as pen pal to Sommer, who attended the morning session. The pen pal activity began in February, when the teacher explained to the children that they would write to each other for the remainder of the school year and would get to meet their pen pals on the kindergarten trip to the zoo in May. A rather typical correspondence commenced between Tommy and Sommer, focusing on vital statistics like age, hair color, and favorite toys. In March, Sommer brought to the teacher a letter she had written to Tommy. After reading the letter aloud, Sommer finally got up the gumption to mention that she thought Tommy was very cute. The teacher suggested that Sommer might like to add something to that effect to her letter.

The final text of Sommer's letter to Tommy was as follows:

UROTUMENS (you wrote to me nice)
I LOEV YOU
TOMM SOMMER (to Tommy from Sommer)
URC BKZURITRIN (you are cute because you write real nice)

Not moved by this addendum in the direction Sommer had hoped, Tommy unflinchingly replied:

[Insert Figure 1 about here.]

When the teacher finished helping Sommer read "I don't love you," Sommer, crushed, promptly burst into tears. After much consolation and attempted mending of the broken heart, the teacher suggested that the best thing So, were could do was to write back, expressing her feelings.

Though not so terse as Tommy's message, Sommer's was as much to the point.

[Insert Figure 2 about here.]

She had written:

No, I don't love you You hurt my feelings

You better watch your mouth

I hate you I hate you

The teacher, also disturbed by Tommy's rep'y, turned over Sommer's letter and added her own message:

[Insert Figure 3 about here.]

After the teacher read aloud to Sommer what she had written, Sommer promptly took the message and added some finishing touches of her own--in red.

[Insert Figure 4 about here.]

The exclamation points were emphatically added throughout the text. Then the final three-line message was written. Sommer read to the teacher: "I hate you forever! I will never love you again! Unless you say sorry." (The final phrase was read even though there is no written equivalent.)



Having had Sommer's printed wrath read to him, Tommy, appropriately contrite, wrote the following reply:

SREFIHETUFANE (Sorry if I hurt your feelings) BY TOMMY

Tommy took his letter to the teacher to read what he had written. It was obvious that he himself was upset, and the teacher discussed the matter with Tommy, trying to get him to express why he was so displeased with Sommer's previous letter. After some conversation, Tommy summed up, saying, "Well, I just don't like it when she say she loves me," to which the teacher replied, "Then you need to write her and tell her that. But tell her in a nice way." He added to his message:

ESTEVLEVILCU TOMMY (Instead of love, I like you. Tommy)

Apparently this letter resolved the conflict by setting the appropriate interactional conditions: liking was all right; loving was not. Correspondence between the two was nothing but pleasant thereafter. May came, and Tommy and Sommer finally got to meet each other on the class trip. For the entire day two absolutely inseparable companions, hand-in-hand, visited every corner of the zoo.

Writing in a Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Program

Sommer and Tommy's correspondence comes from a kindergarten classroom in San Antonio, Texas, one of the several in which we¹ have been working over the last few years, attempting to implement a reading/writing program. It serves to illustrate the central role which writing can play in the lives of kindergarten children. The curriculum development and research being conducted in the classrooms stems from an emergent literacy perspective. Such a perspective assumes that listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities develop concurrently and interrelatedly in early childhood rather than in a sequential fashion, that the functions and uses of reading and writing are as much a part of literacy learning as are the formal skills, that children's early behaviors are a legitimate phase of, rather than a precursor to, literacy development and that these behaviors and conceptualizations develop in predictable ways toward conventional literacy. In essence, the Kinderga-ten Emergent Literacy Program has sought to foster reading and writing abilities in ways that are developmentally appropriate for young children.

Though to our minds too extreme in the conclusions drawn, the line of reasoning which prompted Chomsky (1971) to propose a "write first, read later" philosophy for early childhood literacy instruction has certainly affected our curriculum. Writing is a central activity for the kindergartners from the first day of school for a variety of reasons: It helps children develop their concept of word (Henderson, 1985; Morris, 1981), it facilitates their ability to segment words phonemically and promotes knowledge of letter-sound mapping, spelling, and decoding (Dyson, 1984, 1985; Ehri & Wilce, 1979; Temple, Nathan, & Burris, 1982), as well as their more general abilities in composing and comprehending (Dyson, 1983, 1984; Graves, 1983; Sulzby, 1985, 1986, in preparation; Tierney & Pearson, 1985). In short, writing is a means of teaching the character of written language. Each day the children visit the writing center where they write, "pretend write" or "write the way five-year-olds do" on teacher-assigned topics or topics of their own choosing.

In attempting to integrate writing into the kindergarten curriculum, we have been struck by how important it is to "connect" writing to other aspects of the curriculum if it is to have maximum impact on fostering children's emergent literacy. Other authors' descriptions of developing young children's writing in the classroom accord with such a conclusion (Dyson, 1982, 1983, 1986; Schickedanz, 1986). In this paper three types of connections that have been particularly powerful for the children we have observed are discussed. The first is connecting writing with functional purposes. Second is



connecting writing with reading. Finally, connecting children with other children who are writing has proven to be very important.

Writing for a Purpose

"It is not too simple to say that children begin to write because they want to. . . . " (Gundlach, 1982, p. 136). But why would children want to write? One suggestion comes from the work of Gibson and Yonas (1968). Operating on the assumption that it a child is given an appropriate instrument and a surface for marking, graphic production begins spontaneously, they studied the scribbling of 15- to 38-month-old children in the children's homes in a free-play situation. By providing children with two writing instruments, one which left a mark and one which didn't, Gibson and Yonas found that writing was not done merely to exercise the hands or arms but was motivated by the fact that the children could actually see and manipulate their productions. Thus there seems to be something inherently pleasing to the young child about the process of creating marks with a writing instrument. However, the satisfaction that results from making marks on a page soon dissipates without the presence of an additional factor: a reason for writing. Writing, like literacy in general, is a social process, functioning not as an isolated event, but as a component of social activity. In other words, writing cannot be reduced to a process of representing sounds through symbols; it is an activity typically performed to achieve some goal beyond the act of writing itself. As several recent ethnographic studies have indicated, writing and reading are essentially functional, purposeful activities (Heath, 1983; Reder & Green, 1983; Taylor, 1983; Teale, 1986).

Such a foundation is important to keep in mind when planning literacy instruction for beginning writers and readers. As Taylor (1982) has stated, without an emphasis on making literacy socially significant in the lives of children, we may unwittingly be undercutting the teaching of the skills of writing and reading. Part of "solving the written language puzzle" (Dyson, 1982) is the child's sorting out of the complex relations between what is spoken and what is put on the page. But even before writing becomes a puzzle in this sense, young children face the mystery of understanding just what it is their parents or older siblings are doing when they make marks on paper. An awareness of writing as a goal-directed, functional activity is basic to developing as a writer. Children continue wanting to write long after the initial fascination with the act of marking on the page has worn off, because they see writing as a new means of achieving objectives that they had previously accomplished in other ways. Furthermore, writing can serve as a vehicle leading to new social goals.

Accordingly, we have attempted to emphasize the functions of writing as the basis for the writing aspect of the curriculum in the kindergarten classroom. Writing begins and ends with the functions involved. Taking such a perspective means that features of audience and purpose become especially important. Many of the assigned writings the children do are directed to a particular audience for a particular purpose. The pen pals activity illustrated earlier is one example. Each child writes to his or her pen pal--another kindergartner--communicating, informing, entertaining, and even arguing and resolving arguments. The purpose of writing to one's pen pal is immediately apparent; the audience, concrete (though initially unknown in some ways). Teachers have also acted as correspondents with the children. In one school the kindergartners know that if they deposit a message to the teacher in the large classroom mail box, they will receive a personal reply.

Children are also involved in writing connected with as wide a range of activities as possible. They make menus, construct shopping lists, and write invitations for the annual Thanksgiving feast and Mother's Day Tea. They are encorraged to incorporate writing into their activities in the dramatic play center, much in the fashion described by Schickedanz (1986) that is employed in the Boston University Laboratory Preschool. The encouragement comes from the way in which the dramatic play center is set up by the teacher. For example, the emphasis in the center at one point in the year may be on a doctor's office. Appropriate clothing and other props such as medical instruments will be made available to the children. Also included in the props will be items such as an appointment



book or prescription forms which lead to the children's incorporating writing as an integral aspect of their play.

As well as functional writing that is assigned or directly encouraged by the teacher, children engage in self-sponsored functional writing of this type. After the first few weeks of school in one teacher's class, the children literally lined up each morning after entering the room to give the teacher and read to her personal letters they had written at home the night before. A number of parents also reported that their children wrote many notes to them at home. Schickedanz (1986) describes another interesting form of self-sponsored functional writing among young children in the classroom: signs telling other children "Do Not Touch" a block structure or art project that a child has built or "Save This to Show My Mom."

In short, children want to write because they come to see writing as a way of getting things done. Often, and perhaps most obvious, are things that connect with the daily routines of the classroom or day-to-day activities like communicating with each other. The motivation to engage in such writing is high, precisely because it is so functional and meaningful. This is not to say, of course, that other less 'pragmatic' types of writing like creating or recreating stories are not highly motivating for, and prevalent among, young children. However, we have found writing for functional purposes to be an important bridge into the forms and processes of writing for many five- and six-year-olds.

Connecting Writing with Reading

If the 1970's were the years of schema theory in reading research, then the 1980's may be remembered as the time when research on the reading-writing connection began. Goodman and Goodman (1983), Smith (1982, 1983), and Tierney and Pearson (1985), among others, have attempted to discuss from a theoretical standpoint the significance of the reading-writing connection. In addition, Dyson (1982, 1984, 1985), Ferreiro and her colleagues (Ferreiro, 1984, 1985, 1986; Ferreiro & Gomez Palacio, 1982; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982), and Sulzby (1981, 1985, 1986) have provided empirical or case study information on the relations between reading and writing for young children. This work has shown that, although not mirror images of each other, reading and writing mutually reinforce each other in the process of becoming literate.

Our observations have revealed two acpects of the connection between writing and reading that are especially important for young children. One is the children's reading of their own writing. The other is connecting the reading of literature with the children's writing.

Reading their own writing. . many authors have pointed out, writing involves reading one's own writing. We have attempted to reinforce in the writing center the children's perceptions of themselves as writers by requesting that they "Read me what you wrote" each time a piece of writing is completed. In addition to encouraging children to view themselves as writers, this process provides the teacher with significant insights into the child's developing concepts and strategies for writing. It also serves important instructional purposes for young children.

The diagnostic significance of having children read what they have written is perhaps best illustrated by Sulzby's extensive research (Sulzby, 1981, 1985, 1986) into children's rereading of their own story compositions (both handwritten and dictated). This work led to the development of a seven-point scale to assess different levels of sophistication in rereading attempts (Sulzby, 1985). The scale includes behaviors like "child may produce random-looking marks but will refuse to re-read them" (score: 2); "Child attempts to re-read story but does not keep eyes on print. The story recited is similar to original production but is not stable with it "(score: 4); and "Child's eyes are tracking print and child is matching voice to print" (score: 7). Thus, with careful observation of the child's rereading behaviors, the teacher can learn a great deal about a child's emerging literacy concepts and skills.



The process of rereading can also promote development by increasing children's sensitivity to the distinctions between oral and written language. The requirement that they read their writing places children in the context of having to produce a particular variety of language when they speak. Even though many five-year-olds' productions may initially be oral language-like, modelling by other children and transfer from storybook readings helps develop the idea that written language-like productions are appropriate when one reads.

The process of reading one's own writing has been described as "becoming the reader over one's own shoulder." We have attempted to influence this aspect of children's emerging sense of authorship through teacher modeling in a regularly scheduled Author of the Week activity, patterned after the notion of Author's Chair (Graves & Hansen, 1983). One child reads her writing to the other members of the writing group, and a discussion about the piece ensues. Initially the children have little, if anything, to say about their peers' writing. At this stage, teacher modeling is critical. The eacher demonstrates the kinds of questions the reader (listener) can ask (or the comments she/he can make) about the writing of others and ultimately about his or her own writing. This feedback can focus on the writing process itself and/or on the content of the piece (e.g., "What made you decide to write about your trip?" or "You told us your cat's name. What you can tell us about the things she liked to do?"). It is hard to find direct ev' lence that teacher modeling affects the way in which the child "reads over his own shoulder" during composing. Yet, as the year progresses the children appear to internalize the teacher's approach, as evidenced by the feedback they begin to give their peers during the Author of the Week activity.

Connecting literature with children's writing. A host of studies has indicated that the positive effects of storybook reading on young children's literacy development are numerous, ranging from increased comprehension to improvement in decoding. (See Teale, 1987, for a review of important recent studies such as those of Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein, 1986 or Wells, 1982, 1985.) For this reason, storybook readings are a central component of the Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Program. To extend those effects, various response activities are planned in conjunction with many of the books read in the classroom. Children may produce art work [e.g., make thumb print caterpillars after reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1979)], reenact the story with reltboard characters, or dramatize the story after or during the reading. Writing is also frequently used as a means of responding to stories or in conjunction with the other forms of response just mentioned.

A particular type of book widely used in the classrooms is the 'predictable book' (Bridge, 1986; Rhodes, 1981). Predictable books are meaningful texts that use repetitive (thus, predictable) language patterns and/or are structured according to set patterns. Children can use the language patterns of the text read to them to produce new stories, poems, or songs. For example, the teacher in one room read the big book *Sing a Song* (Melser, 1980), the pattern for which is as follows:

Sing, sing, sing, a song,

Sing a song together;

Sing, sing, sing, a song,

Sing a song together.

The story utilizes this pattern to describe a range of activities engaged in by the tiger family at home. For the response activity, the teacher asked the children to write about their activities in school, using a similar language pattern. Scott wrote the following 10-page production:

[Insert Figure 5 about here.]



Such writing tasks have proven extremely popular with the children and have resulted in weil-formed and interesting pieces, possibly because the model serves as a support framework for the children to use without restricting them to too great a degree.

Writing has also been used in conjunction with other response to literature activities. Creative dramatics and writing is an especially intriguing combination, the effects of which we are only beginning to investigate. A preservice teacher who had worked extensively in the classroom implemented the first planned use of such activities. To begin, she led the students through an exercise in which the demonstrated and discussed certain human personality characteristics and acted out various emotions-happiness, sadness, anger, mischievousness, etc. After that, the teacher read Caps for Sale (Slobodkina, 1940) straight through to the children. The story was then read again and stopped at various points so that the children could act out the scenes from the book, stressing especially the personal attributes or emotions of the characters. Following the activity, the children were asked to write.

As the teacher reviewed the writing the children did, she was struck by one aspect in particular: the writing systems, or spelling strategies, the children used. Table 1 summarizes in the left column the strategies the children had used in the two pieces (taken from their writing folders) written immediately prior to the story reading/creative dramatic activities. In the right column are summarized the strategies used when writing in response to Caps for Sale. [The labels for the spelling strategies are taken from Henderson and Beers (1981) and Sulzby (in preparation).] The striking feature of the change is that in the latter writing 15 of the 16 children (the exception being the child in group 6) used strategies that involved taking into account letter-sound relationships, whereas previously only four children (Groups 3, 4, and 5) had used such systems.

[Insert Table 1 about here.]

Although descriptions of developmental patterns in children's writing are by no means conclusive and there is ample evidence to suggest a range of individual differences in children's writing (Dyson, 1985; Sulzby, 1985, 1986, in preparation), as well as evidence of children's having a repertoire of writing systems they may use at particular points in their growth as writers (Sulzby, 1985, 1986, in preparation), there is nonetheless a general tendency toward more sophisticated strategies being those that employ a phonemic strategy (e.g., early phonemic, letter name) over the use of non-phonemic systems (e.g., scribble, random-appearing letters). In this respect the results from the Caps for Sale writings are most interesting, for they raise the possibility that children employed more sophisticated systems in fulfilling the task done in conjunction with the creative dramatics/storybook reading activity. Observations of children in other creative dramatics activities done in conjunction with storybook readings and examination of their subsequent writings suggest that there is something very engaging about such activities, and consequently that they have important effects on children's writing.

Perhaps these effects can best be understood in the light of Pellegrini and Galda's research (Galda, 1982; Pellegrini & Galda, 1982). These researchers found that enacting stories through play improved story comprehension. Further, in retelling stories the children who had "played" them were more likely to use a more dramatic tone, include more details, and recreate conversations between characters. In effect, the children who played stories appeared to have experienced them more fully. This may be the key to understanding the changes in the children's writing we have observed. Playing the story meant experiencing the story in the fullest sense of the word, and experience underlies successful writing. The children had something to say, and they made every attempt to say it. Certainly, much research remains to be done in this area, but the connections appear to be very promising ones for promoting young children's writing growth.



Connecting Writers With Each Other

The final connection of significance that we have observed among emergent writers involves connecting the children with each other. Of course, since writing is fundamentally a social process, it brings individuals into contact with each other. But the teacher should make every effort possible to facilitate and thereby maximize—both through formalized and informal ways—interactions among children about their writing.

The benefits of permitting, indeed encouraging, interactions among writers are numerous. For one thing, the interactions encourage the development of a community of writers. Writing becomes something that is part and parcel of the fabric of the classicom. A community atmosphere like this gives support to each child's efforts at becoming a better writer.

Also, by interacting the children frequently teach each other about writing. This point is perhaps best illustrated through the examples of Scott, Ben, and Jason. Scott was in one writing group; Ben and Jason, in another. On his first day at the writing center, Scott wrote using invented spellings. His stories were easily read by the adults in the room (See Figure 6 written on September 17). Scott's best friend, Ben, by contrast, began the year using a scribbling strategy to write. On November 13, Ben, who was still writing with scribble (see Figure 7, Ben's writing from November 12), accompanied his teacher to the bulletin board to help her place several of his pieces of writing on display beause he was to be Author of the Week in his writing group. A number of Scott's pieces were already displayed on the bulletin board because he was chosen for the same role from his writing group. The teacher observed that Ben intently studied Scott's writing for a long time. Then Ben went to the writing center where he wrote the piece represented in Figure 8. Notice that Ben used letters to write and that he wrote using invented spelling, a strategy he consistently employed throughout the remainder of the year. Moreover, Ben's writing had the same effect on Jason. When Jason saw how Ben was writing, Jason also began to use invented spellings instead of the scribble strategy he had been utilizing for the past seven weeks.

[Insert Figures 6, 7, and 8 about here.]

The changes in Ben's and Jason's writing demonstrate why the writing center is an area where chatting and sharing are encouraged. Children discuss and read each other's writing. They often hear the oral language that accompanies a companion's composing efforts. They also watch and listen as a child reads his or her piece to the teacher. In these informal ways teachers attempt to promote interaction and capitalize upon peer influence.

There are also more formalized ways of interacting about writing. Children are occasionally asked to read pieces during sharing time. Teachers display the children's work throughout the room and encourage children to read what their classmates are writing. Children's own books become part of the classroom library. The Author of the Week activity, the kindergarten postal system and the pen pal program, discussed above, are other means by which children are put in touch with each other.

The importance of connecting writers with each other cannot be overemphasized. Such a practice aids in creating functional contexts for writing, as was said earlier, and it also fosters positive attitudes toward writing, encouraging children to view writing not as a solemn ritual, but as another facet of social interaction. Hickman (1979) proposed the notion of a "community of readers" to describe how children, in conjunction with classmates and the teacher, work together to help each other learn to read. It might be said that our goal has been to create a community of writers as well.



Conclusion

During the past decade writing has been identified, or perhaps leidentified, as a skill of critical importance. It also has finally been widely recognized as a very powerful learning tool and as a fundamentally social process. Simultaneously, early childhood literacy development has been 'discovered,' and the perspective known as emergent literacy is beginning to take hold. Like many other researchers and reacher educators, we have attempted to utilize the new and exciting knowledge about these areas to devise better educational opportunities for young children.

We described in this paper three types of connections that, in our attempts to implement a developmentally appropriate kindergarten literacy program, have been observed to have a powerful effect on young children's writing development: connecting writing with functional purposes, connecting writing with reading, and connecting children with other children who are writing. In so doing, we mentioned several different types of activities that have been used to help children make those connections. However, it is important to stress that it is not the activities by themselves that make an emergent literacy program work. The fundamental connection is that between children and writing. We must create in the classroom an atmosphere that promotes writing, that makes it desirable to be a writer, that lets the child know that by writing he or she does become a member of a community. "It's not too simple to say that children begin to write because they want to." It's also not too simple to say that children continue to write, and become writers because they want to. The key to making that happen lies in the teacher's interactions with the children.



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Footnote

¹The Kindergarten Emergent Literacy Program is a cooperative project of the University of Texas at San Antonio and schools in several indepenuent school districts in the greater San Antonio area. Wil'1am H. Teale and Miriam Martinez direct the project. We especially want to thank kindergarten teachers Cynthia Cates, Judith Bercher, Frances Hernandez and Robin Carlson, vice-principal (and former kindergarten teacher) Kay Montgomery, kindergarten coordinator Mary Armstrong, and Wanda Glass, all of whom have been intimately involved in the implementation and research that has occurred. Without their help and insights this paper could not have been written.



Table 1
Writing Systems Before and After Creative Dramatics Activity With Caps for Sale

	Strategies Before Creative Dramatics (11/8/85; 11/1 ¹ /85)	Strategies After Creative Dramatics (11/12/85)
Group 1: (n=8)	Scribble, random-appearing letters, or combination of the two	Letter name or letter name with random-appearing letters
Group 2: (n=3)	Scribble, random-appearing letters, or combination of the two	Early phonemic or early phonemic with random-appearing letters
Group 3: (n=2)	Letter name and random-appearing letters	Letter name
Group 4: (n=1)	Early phonemic and random-appearing letters	Letter name
Group 5: (n=1)	Letter name	Letter name
Group 6: (n=1)	Random-appearing letters	Random-appearing letter



Figure Captions

- Figure 1. Tommy's letter to Sommer
- Figure 2. Sommer's letter to Tommy
- Figure 3. Teacher's letter to Tommy
- Figure 4. Sommer's additions to teacher's letter
- Figure 5. Scott's "Sing A Song" Book
- Figure 6. (9/17/84) ONE DAY MY CAT AND ME WENT WALKING BY THE WOODS. WE SAW A BEAR.
- Figure 7. ONE DAYS COCONUT AND HIS FRIENDS WERE PLAYING UNTIL A DRY STARFISH FELL INTO THE WATER. THE BIRDS DROPPED THE STARFISH IN.
- Figure 8. (11/13/84) I AM THANKFUL FOR THE HOLIDAYS BFCAUSE I HAVE A LOT OF FUN.



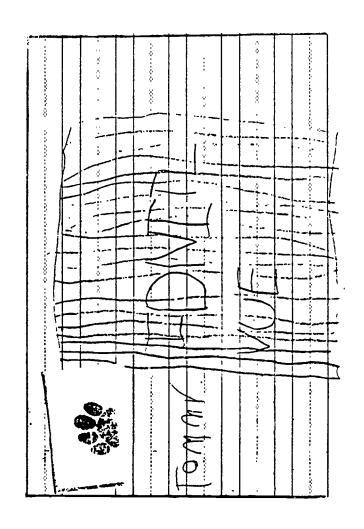


Figure 1





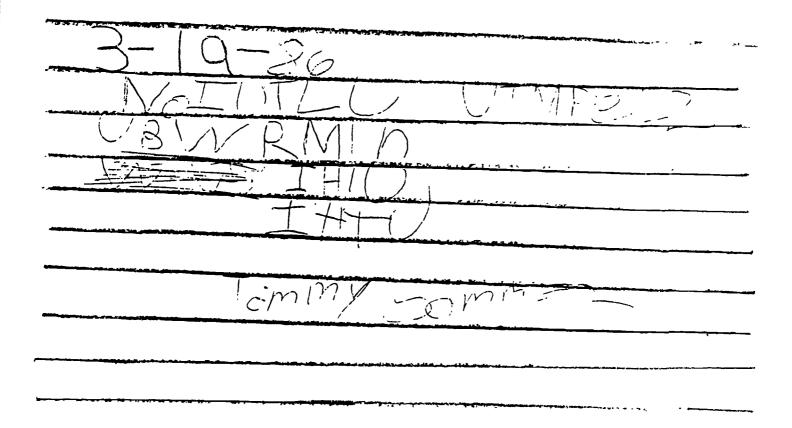


Figure 2



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Juan- in the writing center when Sommen toute this letter to you It really did heat their their fielings. She was very upset.

M.Es Catas

Figure 3



Jomny.

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Journal in the writing Center when Jom new

kirotel, this letter bet your It, really did hinty

her feelings. She was every upset.

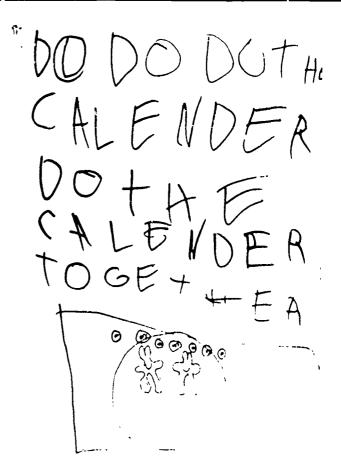
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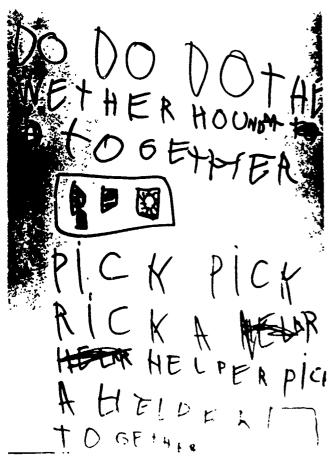
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Figure 4



BY: CONGA-16-8
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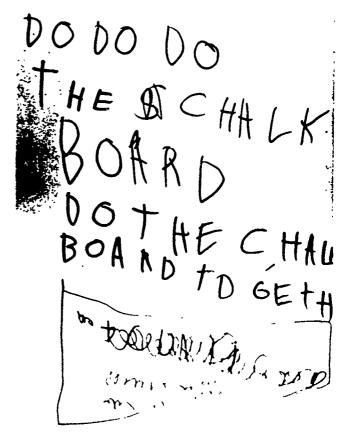


Figure 5

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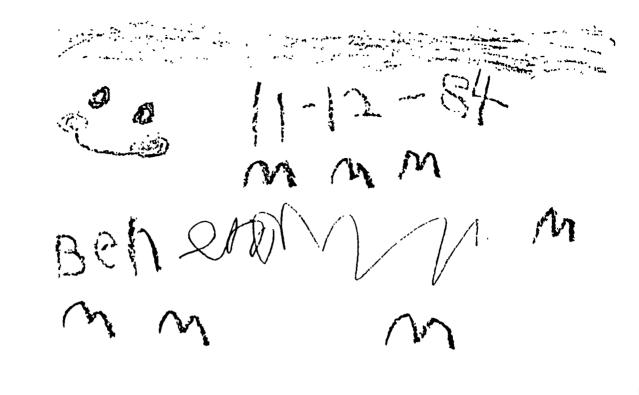
Figure 5 (continued)

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Figure 8

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